

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: MARION MANION
INTERVIEWER: LAURIE MANFREDI
DATE: MAY 23, 1988**

**L = LAURIE
M = MARION**

SF-NA-T030

The following was not a very clear and intelligible recording, which made it very difficult to transcribe.

Tape begins with introduction from interviewer: This is Laurie Manfredi interviewing Marion Manion at my home at 1125 State Road. The date is May 23rd 1988. And this is part of the Shifting Gears, the Oral History Project of the Changing Meaning of Work in Massachusetts.

L: So we were just getting into your first job at Sprague. You're in shipping?

M: This is at (--) My first job at Sprague was in the office of the molded tubular department, which at that time was fantastically successful product that Sprague Electric was making. [L: What?]

Sprague uh, developed and marketed the first molded capacitor, which is the old fashion paper capacitor with an epoxy mold [L: Huh] around the whole thing, encapsulating it. And as I say, Sprague was the first one to ever market this.

L: Did it make it last longer, or did it fit into other elements prettier?

M: Probably, but it, I believe lasted longer too, longer lasting. It was almost like we'd call a, a plastic [M: yeah] film around it of a very high quality. And the trade name for them was "Black Beauties". And Sprague literally sold millions and millions on end of the darn things. There, it was a very interesting thing. But when I first went to work I was a little bit older, I wasn't just a kid. Uh, I had never done anything like that. And to work in an office like that where everyone spoke the jargon of the production line, it was like being in another world. And I'd go home at night and say [unclear] sizes and part numbers to myself to, to try to learn them all so I could understand what people were talking about. Because one of the things we had to do was follow orders through the line. And it was um, multi-staff process. And you could tell if you knew

where they were, where a certain batch of units were, about what time you'd have them ready to ship. And you'd get calls from the sales office saying such and such an order, and it's due to be shipped on such and such a day, is it going to be ready, and this sort of thing. So we had this elaborate system all done manually in those days of course. To keep track of them and to hopefully get all the orders out on time.

L: Did you have it written on a chalkboard, or ? [M: No] No, you just, on a file.

M: In a file cabinet with little three by five cards, which each order entered on it. And then a great big oh, manual book type thing, flipped over pages that had the orders entered in it. And when they were due sometimes it would be ten thousand this week, ten thousand next week, or ten thousand this month, ten thousand next (--)

L: How many people worked there at the plant?

M: In that line, in that molded line? Uh, probably a couple of hundred.

L: And that was at Brown Street?

M: That was at Brown Street, yeah. And back in those days it was very very different. Uh, all the units, one of the things that really struck me when I first started was they had to hand solder these units. Solder the leads on it, you know. And as you come in the door there they had a full big room, long tables, and the women were sitting there with these little soldering parts in front of them, soldering the leads on the units. And I you know, I always thought that was fascinating. But it, you know, all this stuff had to be done by hand in those days.

L: Uh huh. How did you end up going to work at Sprague?

M: Uh, well actually it was some rather severe financial problems in the family. [L: Umhm] Decided we needed another income and the obvious answer was to (--) My children were a little older then. My youngest one was seven and the oldest one was fourteen. [L: Umhm] And I had two girls, fourteen and thirteen who were able to watch the ten year old and the seven year old till I got home from work. So I didn't, I never had to worry about a baby sit or anything. [L: Oh that's good] Because the kids were in school and as I say, the girls took care of the boys.

L: Umhm. Had you worked previous to kids, or in an office?

M: Before, well before, nothing really substantial. [L: Yeah] You know, little (--)

L: No career making.

M: No, no, no. Not as many women had careers in those days.

L: How did you end up going to Sprague's? Had you applied other places, or just knew people?

M: No, just happened to know some people. And you know, go to Sprague. And I went to

Sprague and got a job.

L: So now you said something, did you work any of the manual labor ends of shipping, receiving? [M: No, no] It was always office.

M: Yeah. It was always the office. [L: Very good.] But then I'd been there just about two years. And they moved the whole molded line to Barry, Vermont and [name of city unclear], Puerto Rico. [L: Umhm] So that whole thing just went out. And they were bringing something else in, but the people who were in that office were being layed off and needed you know, to be placed somewhere else. [L: Umhm] And uh, there was an opening in the Industrial Relations Office. This also was an hourly job. The original job I had in the Industrial Relations Office. And so um, Jack Washburn, who was Personnel Manager at Sprague for many, many years, offered me the job in the Industrial Relations Office. So I went there.

L: And that was a clerical job again?

M: Yeah. Yeah. To me that was much easier, because all that, you were dealing strictly with people. It was common sense type stuff. [L: Umhm] You know you, you treat someone the way you'd like to be treated. You, you know, it just, I found just dealing, straight dealing with people was interesting and fun, but (--)

L: Did you mostly deal with managers, or just hourly employees?

M: Uh, both, but primarily with hourly, because what I had done, did on that job was process people who were being hired. [L: Oh] And you know, there's a fair amount of paperwork in this sort of thing. [L: Umhm] So I had done that.

L: Did you decide where they would go to for jobs, or just throw people into jobs?

M: No, the employment manager did that. You know, that's done by a salary person. [L: Yeah] That was the job I ended up with at Sprague's, but that isn't what I was doing then. [Both laugh]

L: Huh. Now what year was that?

M: I went 1955 to 1958. [L: Okay] I worked in Industrial Relations.

L: Huh.

M: In local, what they called Local Industrial Relations. Then a job opened up in Corporate Industrial Relations, which was upstairs over us. The whole Corporate Department was up there. And that was in the publications. And there was an opening there for associate editor of the Logue. And I always was interested in that sort of thing. And I had a chance to take that job, which incidentally paid more money too.

L: Was it hourly still though?

M: That was hourly still, yup. And so I went up and worked on the Logue. And in fact at that time in North Adams we did, excuse me, the Logue and we did uh, six other publications per branch plant. Where all the material was sent to North Adams. We had it done where we would use both [unclear] at that time. [L: Umhm] And uh, instead of having them printed here and set up and sent back now.

L: They did your type setting and you did lay-out and editing.

M: Yeah. And we actually did our own lay-out then. [L: Hm] It was really a fun thing. You know you got a copy. You wrote the copy and of course the big thing in those days was what they called departmental news. Where we had these logue reporters in every department. And they would write their chit chatty stuff and send it in. And uh, it, it was you know, it came in [disrepute?] after awhile. But it, it was really a big deal at that time. [L: Umhm] In fact we used to do two parties a year for our Logue reporters. Always had a picnic for them during the summertime, early summer, like June, or so. And a banquet in the Fall. And you know, that used to be a big thing for them. Of course the company picked up all the expenses. They'd hire an orchestra and have dancing and you know, [L: had a party]. Yeah, it really was a big deal! [L: Yeah!] Yeah.

L: The uh, were there a lot of benefits to be had? I mean when you were working, the insurance and vacation?

M: Sprague always had good benefits. [L: Yeah] Yup. And uh, well they didn't, back in those early days they didn't have major medical and dental and that sort of thing, but of course that was added when, when those became available. [L: Right] But they had a good insurance plan. Very, very reasonable. It seems I paid something like less than a dollar and a half, a dollar thirty-seven cents or something for myself and four children. And it didn't matter whether you had one child or forty, the rate was the same. And employee was, in those earliest days it seems something like eighty-seven cents for one employee. And then with the children it was so much more. And then you could also have the whole family if there were a husband. By that time you know, I was divorced. [Clears throat] So there was just myself and the four children.

L: And still were able to cover the kids?

M: Yeah. [L: Yeah] Up until the time they were nineteen years old. It, it was good. The benefits were very very good.

L: When you were on hourly were you a member of the union, or were you?

M: None of the Industrial Relations people are not by law allowed to belong.

L: You avoided that.

M: Yeah. Well I was a member of the union for the two years I worked at Brown Street. [L: Umhm] That was [unclear], but you had to resign. When I went to the Industrial Relations office you had to resign. There was no question about it.

L: So your job changed. It was still clerical, but it changed from keeping track of items to keeping track of people. [M: Um, um] Yeah.

M: And you know, and I think it's correct. People in Industrial Relations Office shouldn't be (--) You have a great deal of confidential information about (--) You have total histories on every employee [unclear]. [L: Yeah] And also we are aware of a lot of problems as they come up. [L: Umhm] Industrial Relations deals with people problems. [L: Yeah] So it, you know, I think they shouldn't belong to unions.

L: Right. I've lost track of one list of questions. I'll have to stop and find it. Um, I have a list of questions here that Stuart was kind of interested in. Um, one thing we were curious about was, did you have to deal a lot with union leaders? I mean (--)

M: Eventually. [L: Eventually you moved up to that?] I was, because uh, I was uh, as I say I went to Corporate Industrial Relations in 1958 and was Associate Editor until 1964. 1964 I became manager of publications. And that was a salary position. So then from '64 to I think it was '71 um, when I went back down to the Local Industrial Relations as Manager of Employee Relations uh, in Local Industrial Relations you deal heavily with unions.

L: Yeah. Was that a fun job, or were you tougher than they were?

M: Sometimes. Unbelievable. [Both laugh] It uh, you know, you have to deal with the unions through the grievances and that sort of thing. They can, can grieve, they could grieve what I did in hiring some (--) Well that was when I was employment manager. But they could question things even when I was Manager of Employee Relations. They liked [unclear], but they didn't like that, you know?

L: Umhm. Did that job get particularly sticky during the strike in the 70's?

M: That was after the strike by the time I was there.

L: It was after by the time you were there.

M: By the time I was doing it it was after the strike.

L: Are you glad of that?

M: Yes. Yeah, I worked during the strike and that was enough. I was, I was doing publications during the strike.

L: Well now publications, that was all the annual reports and (--)

M: We never did annual reports. We did um, a stockholders report for employees. But the things we did were aimed primarily (--) They sent to salary people, but they were aimed primarily at hourly people. [L: Umhm] And um, stockholders report was never in our area. It was handled by um [few words unclear] president of the company, and through that area. And

the feeling always was they didn't want it done locally, because Lenny always used to say to me, we could do just as good a job with that. And I'd say oh, I know you could Lenny, but the company policy is that it will not be done in the area. It will be done somewhere else. And it always was.

L: Yeah. Well that brought up another thing that I've been thinking of. Was stock options a benefit for some employees? [M: Well only (--)] Or do people buy stock as a consumer?

M: Only, only very very high level people. [L: yeah] Not, not all management people were given stock options. [L: Oh, okay] Just in let's say, select high level people.

L: Um, were you surprised when you moved up to the manager publications? Was that a job step you were expecting to happen?

M: Well yes, no. The uh, people that had had the job (--) Well the first man that I went to work for was transferred to the plant in Concord as an Industrial Relations Manager. Then they brought another man here and I worked for him for four years. And then he went to another position and they brought another man in. Then I worked for him for a year and he got fired. That's when I got the job. So it (--)

L: And you stayed with it?

M: Yeah, I stayed with it. At, at that time there were very very few women in management, very very few. [L: Umhm] It uh, in fact it was, has been for many many years and it was then a very active Management Club. It had dinners once a month and all this sort of thing. And when I first belonged to Management Club there were seven women and probably two hundred men. And at that time the women always had to sit up at the front. There were [unclear] table here and women were always, always together right out front. And it was very clearly, the very first time I ever went, very clearly understood that you did not mingle with the men. You were, you know, this is the women's area, this is where you sit. And it was many many years, however it did happen, before the women finally just went in and sat down like anybody else.

L: Did you actively work for that?

M: Not all that much. No.

L: I suppose when you're seven out of two hundred you don't really [unclear].

M: Well as I say, over the years that gradually grew and grew. And uh, it got the the point where the last few years why the women went and sat anywhere they wanted to like anybody else.

L: I hope so. Are any other women in management still around of the seven?

M: No.

L: No?

M: They were I think at that time most of them were older than I was. [L: Umhm] Uh, one of them was Molly Avery who was R.C. Sprague's secretary. And secretaries per se were not eligible for membership in the management club. But she had a title as Secretary of [unclear], or something like that, um, that made her eligible for management club. [L: Umhm] But secretaries per se did not belong to management club.

L: But there (--) Were all the clerical workers, were they (--) You know, I've heard different talk, different interviews where in the, like in the soldering room, the bosses were men and the clerks were men and the solderers were by and large women.

M: The clerks were usually women. The clerks weren't men.

L: Well [unclear], one woman we talked to said that (--) Well her words (--)

M: I don't remember very many men clerks. [L: Yeah] Clerks were just hourly people who kept (--) Clerks belonged to the IUE. Well at that time it was the ICW or IUE, [unclear]. Uh, secretaries belonged to the office unions. But a clerk in a production department was a production employee per se. They belonged to the production union.

L: Okay. Fair enough. So they, pretty much it was, I don't know, in the times I guess in the 50's and 60's it was women did this kind of work and [M: men did that kind, yeah] somebody did that kind of work.

M: But there were a couple of women foreman. They were you know, vastly outnumbered.

L: From within, or hired from outside?

M: No, no, promoted from within. I think never were they hired from the outside. Of the ones I, I can't remember any that were ever, but they were themselves really excellent production workers. [L: Umhm] You know, I mean line production workers who'd been recognized and given jobs as foreman. And they did good jobs! They really did.

L: I had heard that you know, Sprague really encouraged people to come up from you know, just the [rest of comment unclear].

M: A great great many. Tremendous number. [L: That's (unclear)] Just like one time, oh my gosh 98% of the foremen were line workers who had been promoted to foreman.

L: Increasing pay at the same time?

M: Yeah, yeah. [L: Isn't that something] And that uh, you know, I suppose a little more stature that fact that it was a management position. [L: Umhm] These people certainly knew the lines and knew how it was done. And Sprague was a, is a very labor intensive company. You know people used to compare Sprague to General Electric. You know it's not the same

thing. Sprague does not manufacture an end product. It never did, where G.E. does. So if they increase prices they can very easily pass it on to the customer. Sprague was a manufacturer's manufacturer. They sold to the large radio companies, the electrical companies and all that sort of thing. And they could not, because of competition automatically you know say, well we'll give you guys quite a bit more money because we can pass it on and it doesn't really matter. They couldn't do that. Although the pay scale was not that bad. I think Sprague got a bum-round about, about pays for a long long long long time. [L: Umhm] In fact I can remember one time many years ago, but a girl that was working as a secretary in corporate offices and became unhappy with her boss and decided she was going to leave. She took a job in a good law firm in the area for twenty-five dollars a week less than she was making at Sprague. And certainly I'm sure was working every bit as hard. In a busy law office you work hard. I'm sure she worked every bit as hard for twenty-five dollars a week less than she got at Sprague.

L: [Unclear] what the insurance benefits, or vacation [unclear].

M: You know usually that's one advantage from a big company, they could provide better benefits. [L: Umhm] You know, and vacation policies were good. Very very good.

L: Do you, do you think as a manager were you paid differently than like when you moved up and the fellow just before you got fired, did you move up to his pay scale, or do you think there was any (--)

M: I suspect probably not. I don't know. You know those were always very closely guarded secrets. No one was going to tell you how much money they made. Uh, I strongly suspect not.

L: Okay. So you think there was some (--)

M: Oh sure. Oh sure.

L: There wasn't, it didn't come into play that you were maintaining the same proportion of (--)

M: Doing the same, doing (--) No, no, no, no.

L: And so bread winners [unclear].

M: Because I always use to say that it doesn't make any difference you know. When I go to the grocery store some lady doesn't say, oh, you're a woman so we can charge you less. [L: Umhm] No, that wasn't the way it was.

L: And do you think that held true right through the company?

M: I think it held true in just about every company. I really do. I don't think, you know, [unclear] had any monopoly on that sort of thing. [L: Yeah, that's true.] I really don't. [L: Hmm.]

L: What was it like, uh, being one of the seven out of two hundred? I mean day to day (--) at the

banquets you couldn't really mingle and mix, but day to day were you treated with all do respect?

M: Oh yeah. It didn't make any difference as far as that was concerned. And these were people you knew for a long time and, uh, you know that, that was no problem.

L: Let's go back kind of the beginning. How did you end up in North Adams? One of the things we like to kind of find out is early history, you know. [M: Okay. Yeah.] Who are your parents?

M: No, I was born and brought up in upstate New York, [Dillion?], New York. And when I got married and moved to [unclear], which was right next door, you know, 2-3 miles away, like here to Adams. I lived in [unclear] until 1942 when my husband took a job at the transcript. Uh, Bob Hardman was going into the service then and which replaced in my husband's now job as a reporter to transcript. And that is why we came here. And at that time I had three small children. Uh, the oldest was four, three, and a ten month old baby.

L: Oh my. That is unbelievable.

M: So uh, you know, I kept busy.

L: Yeah, I guess. And you built your house?

M: That was not until ten years later.

L: Oh, okay.

M: We came here in '42 and built the house in '52.

L: Gail's father was mentioning that he remembers the whole series of articles about who's house is being built.

M: Yes, yeah, yeah.

L: It didn't look like too much work.

M: It was work. It was fun.

L: Do you have brothers and sisters? [Unclear]

M: No, I have one brother. My parents are now deceased, of course. I have one brother that lives in Wilton, Connecticut, who is now retired. He is fourteen months younger than I am. But he worked for [Perkin Elmer?] for a good many years in Wilton, Connecticut. [Unclear?], Connecticut, but they lived in Wilton.

L: Did any of your children grow up to work at Sprague, or did they work summers? [M: No.] Never?

M: I had, uh, in fact I always use to joke and say that I was the only person in North Adams who didn't have anybody in my family working at Sprague Electric. Uh, my one daughter, my second daughter worked one summer at Sprague, the summer when she graduated from high school. Before she went, well she went into a degree program at Burbank Hospital in Fitchburg. In fact received a great scholarship. And uh, she did work that summer in the sales office at Sprague.

L: That's the first I heard of scholarships. Was that? How did that work?

M: They got scholarships for years. They started in '51 if I remember correctly. And the program kind of expanded over the years. That was administered by corporate industrial people. And uh, 1957, when Patty got hers there were four, \$2,000 a year scholarships. [L: Wow!] And uh, one \$1,000, which was a, they specify as a nursing scholarship. Well, Patty went to Burbank Hospital to learn Nursing, but also the degree program. So that when she graduated, she would get an RN and a BS degree. So she got the \$2,000 scholarship.

L: And that was funded by the company?

M: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Aided \$300-400 a year for four years.

L: And it made a difference? What was tuition? Do you remember?

M: At Burbank it was not (--) She went to through school, you know, remember I didn't have that much money at that time. [L: Right.] Uh, she went through Burbank under \$2,000 plus, well once they had been there and in training for a bit, they could work in the hospital and work on the floor and that sort of thing. And she earned extra money. She would baby sit for doctors families, and that sort of thing. But she basically went through on that \$2,000 plus the money she earned. You know, I would try to send her a little spending money, but that was really no big deal.

L: Do you remember what your hourly rate was when you first started on hourly at Brown Street?

M: \$1.05.

L: \$1.05. So you really were hourly for what, four or five years?

M: Yeah. From 1953-1964. Nine years.

L: Nine years, yeah. Do you remember what your last hourly was?

M: No, that I don't remember.

L: They always stayed ahead of minimum.

M: Oh yes, well ahead. Yeah, they were well ahead. But, I can't, can't remember exactly what

they are. I know that uh, all the jobs were in ranges and evaluated. [L: Umhm] And when I went from Industrial Relations, Local Industrial Relations hourly, to corporate, the bottom of, and there were steps in each range, the bottom of the job as the Assistant Editor who is higher than the top of the [unclear].

L: So it would jump some, somewhat?

M: Of, of a half way reasonable amount. Yeah.

L: Was that true always, true that every job was rated and the steps within?

M: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

L: How were those set?

M: Uh, it had people on staff that that was there job. Job evaluations.

L: Time study. Job evaluation.

M: Well originally it was time study stop watch. For many, many years it was. And then they got into a new system where it was the motion end. Then you, take you so long to do from here to here, and that sort of thing. Supposedly more accurate than a stop watch.

L: Do you believe it is, or was?

M: No. [L: No?) I don't think the stop watch is very accurate, uh, because you know, you know somebody is putting a stop watch on you, you would be amazed at how slow they became. But you know, and they, they were good at it. You didn't want to get it down to be too slow so that somebody would say, oh yeah, you know, knock it off, but they sure didn't go at the pace they should have. In fact, bonus work was historically made good.

L: That's true.

M: Good money. And the girls in the Industrial Relations Office that uh, later worked for me would say, because if you weren't there at the day your paychecks came in, the checks got sent to the Industrial Relations Office and they had to come down there to pick them up. So they had all those checks. They'd have checks each week, you know. And they use to say "look at that check, look at what you made."

L: I will have a transfer to that, right.

M: Sure. They would be making higher percentage bonuses, and making big money. They really were.

L: I guess that's okay to go to the office sometimes. [Chuckles]

M: They worked hard, and you know, they were unbelievably dextrous some of them. They could really (--) They got it down to a science and they were good. You know, I couldn't begin to go in there and do it like they did.

When a job became available it was posted first in the department where the opening exist. And anybody in that department could bid on it. The job would be posted for 24 hours. And anybody who wanted to bid on it could bid on it.

L: And that gave all the shifts a chance.

M: For the whole 24 hours. Then if no one bid on it in the department, then the job was sent to the Industrial Relations Office. And one of our girls did what we call plant postings once a day. And they would be posted in designated areas. Everybody knew where they were throughout the whole plant. And they would be up for 24 hours. Then anybody could bid on it. And the one with the most seniority got it.

L: Whether or not their boss liked the idea of them leaving, they were too good to let go?

M: They would have nothing to do with it. You couldn't, you could not bid, like today [unclear]. You had to go on a job before you could bid on another job. They could hold you on your job for two weeks, or they got a replacement, to get the replacement for the next job. [L: All right] And you could, you could bid higher at any time. You could not bid [L: for a lesser job] for a lesser level. [L: Lesser grade, yeah. Huh.] In less than three months. You had to wait three months.

L: Huh. So they, they were willing to train people pretty much as to what you wanted to do. Was there a favorite place to end up? I mean, we've heard Brown Street was a lot of fun and people (--)

M: Yeah. It became a lot of fun, but when I left it was not a lot of fun. It was more or less, you know, low spot on the total pole then. But in early years, yeah, it was really great. Early years when I was there. Not early years in the company. But Sprague Products at one time was considered a great place to work. That was all office, that wasn't production. Um, [Taneling?] Department eventually became the special place. They had [taneling(?)] units where another that were made there and produced by Sprague Electric. Made many, many pennies. And for many years Sprague was the only one that made a [unclear] capacitor. And then that became you know, a real good place to work.

L: Now you said Brown Street wasn't so much fun towards the end. When?

M: Toward the end it really was down hill run. The products they had were old. They use to call me old dirty capacitors. Uh, and they more or less the very very old types. And there wasn't the demand accordingly. And it (--)

L: So they were still making them, they were just selling them out of stock pile?

M: No, they kept making them. [L: They make them] Yeah. And Brown Street made the

largest units that Sprague made in North Adams, but um, it you know, they came upon some hard times. Now I understand that Brown Street is great. They are really, really doing well and their employment is going up steadily and (--)

L: What would you judge the employment that you see either at Brown or overall were when you left?

M: Oh, it was down around 1600 when I left.

L: Do you think the big strike was the reason why so many of the jobs went, or do you think that some of the products were outdated and the jobs were going to be fading anyway.

M: Well the strike had an influence, a bad influence. I don't think it was that primarily. The rise in the union, the IUE, had [unclear] on it. It really did. It was not the same. They had some pretty radical leadership and it took its toll. And the strike itself, well we involved North Adams, as you probably heard a hundred times, but the people were buying from Sprague Electric got, you know, because there was so much publicity on the strike that all Sprague was involved in the strike. Actually, everything that was made in North Adams was made somewhere else. But then during the period in the strike there was also a down turn in the economy which very adversely affected the company. In the country as a whole. So it was just a double wammy on this thing and it was really devastating. [L: Yeah.] It really, really was.

L: Well that's towards the end of the Vietnam War and the military.

M: It just you know, it compound the felonies. It was rough.

[TAPE STOPS MOMENTARILY, THEN BEGINS AGAIN]

M: Because that was the tail end of the part that I was working in publications. And so, you know, we just kept pretty much doing the same thing.

L: Just kept them.

M: The hardest part was coming to work everyday and going through a picket line.

L: Did people in the picket line bother you, or harrass you?

M: They didn't bother. I never had any trouble. But I came into work one day and my secretary was in tears. I said, "what's the matter." Well she was trying (--) They had doubled the picket lines. One went this way and one went this way, which is not legal, but nevertheless that's the way it was. And uh, she had got half way through and was in the center there and somebody started shooting her with a water pistol, and her hair was soaking wet. And it was more just a humiliation of it happened. You know, she wasn't actually physically hurt or anything. "It makes me so mad!" But they always use to tell us, you know, don't charge the picket line. Just get up to it and stand and kind of watch. And every once in awhile somebody would kind of give you a wink and they would let you through. Then you would get to the middle, and you

would have to kind of just watch again and then somebody would let you through to get to the door.

L: I suppose you would just end up being late some days.

M: Oh it didn't matter. If you (--) I (--) It didn't matter what (--) Certainly with the salary people they, didn't matter where you didn't have to come in and punch a clock at 8:00 in the morning. Yeah. And we never went home, by time we went out at night that was never any, they didn't bother you that much. There weren't not that many around, but you know, there was a heavy concentration of them when you came in in the morning.

L: Yeah, and they kept that up? [M: Oh yeah] They were there every day. [M: Oh, yeah.] And what was (--) I wasn't anywhere near the area, I was just graduating high school at the time. So I really wasn't paying much attention to North Adams. How, how many, how long did this strike go on for?

M: Fifteen years.

L: Fifteen years. That is a long fifteen years. Who, who was out first on that? I heard it was office workers?

M: Yeah.

L: Did they have the most to gripe about, or they were just influenced?

M: Well there was always, uh, you know, a lot of feeling about that, because they never made public what the office union vote was to go on strike. And there were a lot of people who afterwards felt strongly that you know, it did not want to strike. People who were in the office themselves were saying "I know this and that one and they all voted no", and yet they went out on strike. And they more or less had forced the production to go out with them.

L: Because they were out for a couple of weeks. A week or two or three before (--)

M: Not that long. [L: No?] No. It was only a matter of days.

L: It was days?

M: Yeah. Yeah. And you know, when they first left there was, used to be lots of performances out. Right, because our offices were right in the front and, uh, they had International Union Leaders there, and stuff. It was, one guy one day threw himself down in front of the truck and said that the truck had hit him.

L: How were you dealing with that like, you know, the Logue was still going on (--) Were you not [unclear] to interrupt the chit chat?

M: Oh it interrupted the chit chat, yeah, but we just published a regular (--) And uh, you know,

you have to be careful, because you can't do anything that's foolishly going to influence the people. So that you were rather non-committal about that.

L: Umhm. You probably have to be [unclear].

M: But it, it was an interesting time. I wouldn't particularly want to do it again.

L: Have you ever been, you'd been through any strikes before that?

M: No, never. No, it was a new experience.

L: Had any of your bosses, they lost to some of them?

M: No. Not really. Because (--) [L: Unclear] I had heard about when the machinist went on strike at one time, but that was a relatively small group of people. [L: Uh hmm.] You know, nothing compared to the whole plant being out. You can operate the plant without the machinists there to a degree.

L: How did they know that the strike was happening? You know, I mean you have all these people working at this place.

M: The vote was taken at night. [L: Yeah] And then they just didn't show the next morning. But we didn't know it at the time it happened. [L: Yeah.] You know, we had people who would let us know. We were in the office waiting to get word on [unclear].

L: The final count, yeah. So, you weren't really surprised?

M: Surprised in the office one, yes. [L: Really?] Yeah, because the first indication we had was that it would be a yes vote. And then not too long after that got a phone call saying now that they had voted to strike.

L: Oh. Were they local leaders that started this whole thing? [M: Yeah] So it was people that had been there for a while? [M: Hmm]. And it was primarily wages?

M: Yeah, yeah. But uh, just a long long [unclear] type thing. You know, I don't think the issues were that clear. It's just [rest of comment unclear]. Maybe we could strike, or maybe we should strike, and we ought to strike, and yeah let's uh, away we go.

L: Did all the unions benefit unilaterally?

M: I don't think so. Only about 1/3 of the people that went out on strike came back when the strike was over. You know orders were down that much that it's only about a 1/3 of it that got called back. Subsequently, yes more were added on as things began then, but it you know, it was a fair amount of time. [L: Yup] So it was only the most senior ones, and the union insisted on the less senior.

L: Could the people who were laid off after the strike collect? Were there any unemployment benefits?

M: I wasn't doing it (--) I did unemployments when I was employment manager, but uh, I believe once the strike was over and they didn't get called back, that yes, they would collect unemployment.

L: Were there any big lay-offs when you were employment?

M: A couple of times, yes. Fairly decent, you know, fairly good size ones, yeah.

L: Were they all, people kind of expected on them. It was like (--)

M: It would happen or, you know, they'd get picked up, and then we gradually got them back again. And it was, that was also part of the record keeping, because that had to be kept in absolutely correct order. They would call back on seniority order.

L: They were laid off by seniority and called back by seniority.

M: Yeah. Although Sprague never had the bit that GE has where you could bump. In Sprague you cannot bump. [L: Okay, no bumping] And your seniority was department seniority. So say, just say [Taneling(?)] Department had to lay off 25 people. Uh, and then their work started to pick up. The 25 people in [Taneling(?)] were called back first. Even though the least senior, the ones that were laid off, they had the years seniority, and over here in Filters possibly we had somebody with ten years laid off, the department seniority was prime. And then once you get everybody back in that department, then you looked at [L: it was open posting] everything that was left. All the departments. [L: Yeah, everybody's department.] Then they got called back quickly, [L: unclear] and you did post though. If there was an opening other than the department, you would post plant wide. And anyone who was there could bid the job that would make another one open below it. But if there was a higher rated chart, they could move to that and then you'd bring [L: the most senior in that office] the person that [unclear] back in to, to that one.

L: So you had to work with employment security? Was it a state program then? No?

M: No, no. Strictly union contract.

L: Union contract.

M: Yeah. We worked, we had to work a lot with the Division of Employment Security simply on unemployment, because every time anyone was layed-off they'd go and sign up for unemployment. And then they send, what they do is send the request for unemployment to you. You have uh, twenty-four hours to answer it and send it back. I accept this claim or I reject it. If you reject it then the person, they deny their unemployment, but the person has the right of appeal. [L: Umhm] If they appeal then you have to go to a hearing and uh, (--)

L: Did you end up with a lot of those?

M: No.

L: No. Just pretty straight forward stuff. We layed them off (--)

M: A good, great majority of it. And that you know, the unemployment just come in, you know, we just uh, we accept his claim with them and that's all there was to it. But every once in awhile we'd get a sticky [few words unclear]. We had a young man who lost his job because he was sent to jail. And so we terminated him. That wasn't a lay-off, that was a termination. And he got out of jail and he came back and he wanted his job. And we said that we were sorry we didn't have anything at that time. So he went and files for unemployment. When the claim came in we protested it. [L: Umhm] So I went to a hearing on that one. And those hearings are by state examiners, not the local people. They're held in the local office, but by state examiners. [L: Yes] You know, which they record. It's all recorded. And why did he, why did you protest this? And I said, we don't give leaves of absence for someone who goes to jail. Well as it turned out afterwards, the man told me afterwards they would have denied it if we had not. [L: Yeah] He said, "that's all right, we don't pay unemployment for somebody who goes to jail." So.

L: Um, just (--) I don't know if you're, if you're familiar with any of the numbers of the breakdown of employment figures, the percent of men and women overall, like before the war and then after the war, I mean those (--)

M: Before the war, or during the war it was highly, it must have been predominantly women. [L: Yeah] It got down to the fact uh, by I guess maybe late seventies, eighties, it was close to fifty percent. [L: Really?] Yeah.

L: And that was overall [M: 50/50] except for management.

M: No no, that included the managers. [L: That was all over?] That's the total number [unclear]. And at that time of course one thing that, there was so many corporate people in North Adams that a lot of them were men. [L: Umhm] You know, all of your corporate sales were there, you're corporate purchasing, corporate industrial relations, all those corporate things. Corporate QAR and you know, the great majority of those managers were men. The great majority of them were brought in from outside the area. [L: Did many?] Many many of them were. Many of them were. Because there was corporate recruiting too, which was uh (--) You know, part of Corporate Industrial Relations was the corporate recruiting. And we did at one time recruited your [unclear?] employment. You know, many companies were doing that. And we had sent a recruiter to England several times.

L: It wasn't an outside head hunter agency like you have now, or somebody from within the company going to hire likely people. Huh, jeeese. Um, was there a lot of, you know, there was, I'm sure there wasn't hiring by ethnic groups, but was there a lot of ethnic togetherness in the plants? Did you notice any?

M: No, uh, in fact you know, we had, later years affirmative action would use [few words

unclear] and everything else. And we had a higher percentage of [Nordies?] working at Sprague than there was in the community?

L: Wow, how did you do that?

M: Uh, well, [rest of sentence unclear]. We had you know, say two thousand people. And um, the percentage of Nordies in the community, Blacks, Hispanics, and this sort of thing where there's like 2%, maybe we had 4%, or something like that.

L: Huh.

M: And it uh, it never was any problem. We had several Black people that had worked at Sprague and were a quarter of a century years and years ago. [L: Uh huh] Years and years ago.

L: And everybody was always eligible for ever for posting a job, a transfer job?

M: Oh sure, oh sure. It had nothing to do with it. In fact the only time you heard any kind of a rumbling at all after the Korean War. We had a few uh (--)

SIDE ONE ENDS

SIDE TWO BEGINS

L: Okay, you were talking about the (--)

M: Yes, these women were extremely dextrous. And they like nothing better than to get a nice little bonus job. And they could make a hundred percent bonus and better. And you know, that's the only time I ever heard anybody say anything. They'd say uh, they're too good, we can't keep up with them.

L: The time study people wouldn't jump on something like that?

M: They occasionally would come in and lower, check the rates or something. But these people were as I say, unbelievably dextrous.

L: Just very quick, yeah.

M: And that was the prime thing. That on the boards job is, it is the manual dexterity.

L: Um, what was the quality control like at the time. I mean I'm sure they were looking for 100% good product. Um, do you have any (--) I mean it's one thing to be fast, another thing to be good, you know?

M: Well, yes, they were, they had in the departments, each department had what they called

check inspection. And nothing could leave the department as far as being shipped until it had what they called the CI stamp on it. [L: Umhm] That means checked by a check inspection and had them approve it, and say it was okay to go. That you know, the quality was [unclear]. You couldn't have a rejected unit.

L: Yeah. Hm. The uh, during the war (--) No. Well this is really (--)

M: No, I wasn't there. [Laughs]

L: This is really before your time. So it's (--) Yeah, I had heard that you know, they were trying to you know, everything had to be good to be in the field. And that the quality inspections really stepped up.

M: Yeah, it could well be, because Sprague was into you know, pretty vital defense things.

L: Yeah. Yeah. That would make sense, absolutely. What was your typical day like, um, you know, from the time you went in in the morning? You know, down in Industrial Relations?

M: In which one? Industrial Relations?

L: Yeah.

M: Well [few words unclear] job as employment manager, the first thing you do you know, just keep your eye on (--) Check the girls and make sure that they didn't have any problems with their work, because they were the ones that did the actual record keeping. And you'd have to check and see if you had jobs, [unclear] needs to be filled. And uh, sometimes I would interview almost all day if there were a lot of job openings. And people would often, very very often just walk in the door and put in an application. Or we had files with previous applicants. And I would, had a little notation on each one which nobody else could recognize about how I had ranked that person when I talked to him. Made just some little remark to help me familiarize myself with that person. We also kept a record if a person came in more than once. Updated their application and that sort of thing. So if you were in a hiring mood like that you could spend a good bit of your day um, talking to people about possible jobs and that sort of thing. Then we always had the postings that had to be done everyday. And those had to be checked. I didn't actually do the posting, because the girls did them, but be sure that they were all right and that they did go out at a certain time. Um, then you have of course any phone calls from the employees, or from the union people who were wondering about something, or questioning something. And you know, they'd stop in to see you, or something like that. There were meetings on policy and how you were going to handle certain problems you might have, or this sort of thing. We did a great deal with employee benefit type things. Like uh, service award dinners, uh, that sort of thing. We used to many years ago have lots of baseball teams, and bowling teams, and all that sort of thing. But that all stop after the strike. [L: Yeah]

We still continue the Quarter Century.

L: You do now?

M: [Coughs] Not now, no. But up until 1985 they did.

L: Yeah.

M: And very careful records were kept as to what the Quarter Century membership was. How many had been admitted. How many admitted each year. And then the total. How many were still employed. How many were no longer [unclear]. How many were deceased. And every year at the Quarter Century Banquet Mr. Sprague always would give those you know, [few words unclear] so many are still employed, and this sort of thing. Prior to the strike we also used to do um, a dinner for previous recipients of Quarter Century. Anybody on the whole North Adams, we did a twenty years banquet, a fifteen year banquet [unclear] every single year.

L: Wow.

M: And they were a lot of work getting them together.

L: That could be a sizable number of people.

M: Oh yeah, yeah. And it would vary from year to year. But uh, and there were the awards of watches of course for uh, Quarter Century people, but they were real nice. [Coughs] Excuse me. Twenty years, ten year, five year, I guess I skipped fifteen, but (--)

L: Umhm.

M: And then eventually started doing pins for thirty years. [coughs] Excuse me! For thirty years, thirty five, forty and (--)

L: People were there that long?

M: Oh yeah, it went up to fifty years.

L: Most of the managers turned over and either moved up or move out? Or (--)

M: Local people stayed a lot more than (--)

L: Yeah. Yeah.

M: You know, some of them said, [L: comment unclear] in the later years people they brought in were, were more mobile then, would go on. But people that um, you know, were born and brought up here, a good many of them stayed, [L: yes] for many many years.

L: Did you ever get any thoughts of going on? Your two kids have moved out, [unclear] moved out (--)

M: No, not really. I really, I always enjoyed my job. And you know, had the house and [L: friends] by that time it was paid for. [Laughs], which is always an incentive. But no, I (--)

L: When you were, can we talk about before about hiring? Did you hire people out of the file? You know, a job came open and did you start flipping to the old applicants file to find people?

M: Yeah. Yeah. You'd uh, you'd remember somewhat, some of them, you know, and some of them you'd say, oh you know, I think this may possibly be good. And you call them and ask them to come in for another interview.

L: Did uh, were there a lot of summer jobs? You know, employee's kids.

M: At one time, at one time.

L: Was it make work, or was it really work?

M: No, it was work, because we encourage regular employees to take their vacation in the summer. So you know, we'd bring the [unclear] in for vacation replacements for the regular production people. [L: Umhm] We used to have a lot of them. A couple of hundred of them.

L: Oh, they all [unclear] to your office?

M: Yeah. Yeah. And they all had to be children of employees.

L: Yeah, well, that's where you can help out where you can.

M: Yup. Really it made a difference. [L: Yeah] It made a difference.

L: [Unclear] by loyalty and the parents can keep them in line.

M: And the kids, the kids [unclear] too near their parents, you know. You know, parents would be in one place and they'd be at another. [L: yeah] Didn't ordinarily place them there, you know, or [unclear].

L: Even at home, you know, you better behave.

M: Yeah that's true.

L: That's [unclear]. [Laughs]

M: That's true. But as I say, that summer my daughter worked there the only time any of my family ever worked at Sprague's, she worked in the sales office. And uh, she enjoyed it. She [unclear]. But as I say, that's the only one of my children and I have no other family around here. So. [Laughs] I'm not one of the ones that had a lot of family working in Sprague.

L: Um, when it came time for you to leave Sprague, they were kind of moving out? [M: Yeah] Is that right?

M: The Corporate offices had already moved out. And so it uh, you know, a great deal of cutting back. As I say, I was over sixty-five, so I decided it would be a good time to retire.

L: Probably. Would you, if they had stayed would you have kept on?

M: Yeah, I would have. Yeah, because I enjoyed it, but I haven't been sorry I did it. It's great, you know. Go to the Cape and I don't have to come back on Sunday and meet the traffic. I can come back any day I feel like.

L: Yeah, that's true. Um, were there a lot of policy changes that you had to implement? Just kind of sweeping changes of any kind that you remember, or different program?

M: I can't really think of anything. Do you have anything that you were thinking of?

L: No. I was just kind of (--) Somewhere I have it on a piece of paper that has a time schedule on it.

M: Oh. You know things change over a period of time certainly, but I can't remember anything. Well the bit when they went from time study to what they call work factor. Uh, that was (--)

L: Was it popular?

M: Not at first. But it um, I don't think it really bothered him all that much afterwards. They didn't like the idea of having the system changed and the method of rating had changed. But I don't think it made that much of an impact [unclear]. And you know, the benefits kept improving all the time, the wages went up.

L: Why would anybody complain? [Laughs]

M: They didn't really (--) There was a lot of good. There's always somebody that perhaps may have been unhappy about something, but, but then, [L: but there always is I guess] then where can you go where you, you know, no one is ever unhappy.

L: The uh, did the union activist, once the strike kind of happened, did they stay around? Did they just go back [unclear]?

M: Well the national leaders weren't there, [L: The national leaders] but the regular leaders were there. Walter Wood was president of IUE for a long time. [L: Umhm] But uh, you know, ended up in the last few years I was there with Assistant IR Manager in our office.

L: So he jumped over?

M: Umhm.

L: And was that a popular think in the Rank and File, or?

M: It happened Bob Diodaty was IR Manager, had been president of the Office Union. Although he became IR Manager before Walter became Assistant. But you know, they both had been, had been union presidents in their respected unions. Walter had been instrumental in organizing the IUE when I came into Sprague. But he was very fair, very honest, very, very people oriented for his people, and always, you know, [unclear] the relationships that we had when he was president of the union was always very cordial. And he'd come, and if he had questions he had no problems about asking it, or, but you can sit down and talk about it in a reasonable manner, and you know, get it resolved.

L: So there was no hard feelings when they came into the office. They were still just reasonable people to work with this Walter Wood and Bob Diodaty?

M: Yeah. Bob Diodaty was Industrial Relations Manager when I first went to Local Industrial Relations as Manager Employment, Manager of Employment Relations. And then I had been there awhile when, when Walter came.

L: And they were both, you enjoyed working for them both? [Comment unclear]

M: Oh sure, yeah, yeah. Very different personalities, but I enjoyed working though. [Unclear] always interesting. There's always a lot of things to discuss. And you know, how can this be handled, and how can (--)

L: Did you go to them with a lot of [unclear] or anything? Or did they come to you with "how can we do this?"

M: Occasionally, or occasionally you know, Walter and I particularly because we were basically the same level. Where you know, he was swamped with something, he'd say "can you possibly help me out with this?" "Hell sure." And if I had something, you know, "I really got three things to do at once, can you do this?" "Yeah sure." It's always you know, very much (--)

L: How many people were working in your office?

M: Uh, we had the medical department too, as far as the insurance record. [L: Umhm] There were two there and one, two, three, four, without the receptionist [unclear] uh, four girls. And then the receptionist. We didn't always have a receptionist. They started that afterwards. It used to be people came in through the gatehouse, checked in with the guards. And then they kind of decided you know, that we really should have a reception area. So they took the front part of the building, make a reception area, and we hired a receptionist.

L: Okay.

M: [Comment unclear]

L: And that was at Brown Street?

M: No, no, Marshall Street.

L: Marshall Street. Okay.

M: That little separate building right up in front was uh, (--) Well as you face the building my office was on the left. The left of the door. [L: Okay] And the reception area was on the right hand side of the door.

L: Umhm. Now did other people in the office do interviews too, or?

M: No, no, nobody else did the interviews.

L: You really were (--) Is that something (--) It must have been easy for you to do.

M: Yeah, it's interesting, it really is. Yeah, I always enjoyed it.

L: How many people do you figured you employed, or kind of went through your hands?

M: Oh goodness I don't know.

L: [Laughing]

M: [Unclear]. I really couldn't say. I couldn't make an educated guess on it. You know it would vary.

L: What was the maximum employment that you remember in the time that you were at Sprague?

M: About 4300.

L: 4300. That's a lot of people.

M: Too many. [L: Yeah] We couldn't afford 43, that was too high.

L: Yeah. Let me show you my time schedule here. Do you, do you remember when the other plants closed? You know, Wall Street, or Gail Shoe, or any of the factories in the fifties?

M: Gail Shoe. I know we had a girl that worked as a secretary up in the corporate group. Everybody worked at Gail Shoe company. But she had worked just a couple of months longer than I had. So Gail's, that was '53. I think she started late '52, or something like that and she [few words unclear] off of Gail's. But (--)

L: They really didn't bring in a lot of those people to Sprague.

M: Of course I wasn't (--)

L: You were there. You were [rest of comment unclear].

M: For those first two years I was at Brown Street where you, [L: right] you know, [unclear] I gradually learned you know, a very very great deal of the company history and all because of publications. [L: Right] And some of the things we did, like we did a special publication, a magazine on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Logue. The Logue was first published in August of 1938. Uh, and we did a 25th Ann (--) And we do a lot of, I did a lot of research and go back to the war years [unclear]. We had a lot of material. I had a copy in that, one of the files there was the copy of the uh, transcript which announced that Sprague was coming to North Adams. And uh, there was all the things about during the war when Sprague received these Army/Navy "E" awards. And fantastic celebrations they had. And at the old Richmond Hotel where they had these big celebrations. And people, we had a whole bunch, a couple of envelopes filled with these Army/Navy "E" pins that each employee had been given at that time. All those things just, just disappeared.

L: Yeah. You don't think they're kicking around somewhere?

M: Who knows. [Whispers] I can't imagine where. I don't know. I can't imagine.

L: [Comment unclear]

M: There were you know, we had a whole [unclear], a whole photo file of um, well portrait photos of the top executives of the company and bibliographies on them, that sort of thing. And a lot of other pictures that had been used in the Logue and taken at various Sprague events, and all this sort of thing. You know, very carefully preserved I thought.

L: You never ended up with any of this stuff at home? You just look at it at work and left it there?

M: Why on occasion we'd take it home and work on it or something, but I didn't, that was, it was long before we ever thought this stuff might disappear. In fact I had, I was retired when actually it, it disappeared. [L: Umhm] And I didn't know about it until afterwards. In fact one Sprague executive died [few words unclear], we got a phone call and they said can we get a copy of the bibliography you had on, on this man? No I can't. I know where it used to be. I have no idea where it is now. And then they were all gone. [Few words unclear] We had employee handbooks that we did [few words unclear]. Every single one was kept on file as they were updated so you could (--)

L: That would be fascinating.

M: Fascinating to, to go through. [Whispers] I don't know where they are.

L: [Few words unclear] from when you first started at Sprague, do you remember what vacation times were? You know, after so many you get one week, [few word unclear].

M: One week after, I think it was a week after a year. Two weeks after five years. Three weeks

after fifteen. I wonder if it was four after twenty. And if you always got five after twenty-five. I don't remember. And you try to remember what you were getting. [L: Yeah] I know it was one week, but we had to work five years to get two weeks. Uh, then you had to work fifteen years to get three weeks. And right before I got three weeks, or the very near I got three weeks, which was fifteen years, they moved it back to twelve. [Both laugh] And they got it down so that now they get three weeks after ten. [L: Umhm] And uh, if it's four weeks after fifteen now, but five was the max. You get five after twenty-five.

L: Hm. It's quite something.

M: But it was longer. [Long pause]

L: Um, just, there's a note here. Um, we were talking about industrial relations. Um, what is industrial relations?

M: Industrial Relations handles all the people problems. The grievances. Industrial Relations negotiates the contracts and handles any, any problems you [few words unclear]. If a foreman has a problem and he's having difficulty, call Industrial Relations. Ask them, you know, what do I do?

L: You, so you contract a policy and you (--)

M: Oh yes. The policy manual is the bible.

L: Yeah, but the day to day, just problems around the department were up to the supervisor and then [unclear].

M: Well yeah, the supervisor and the foreman. But [unclear] occasionally, when it came into a question of contract interpretation. You know, no matter how well written any contract is, it can't conceivably cover every possible thing that might happen. And there would be things that would happen and the union would say, possibly, look, it's past practice to do it this way. And we'd say no, it isn't. It's past practice we've done it this way. Well that's when you, it's not written down in black and white. Somehow you've got to mediate and come up with something that's really satisfactory. And it's amazing how many thing come up that you, you know, it never came up before, and that you would have to just sit down and talk about and come to an agreement on. That's all.

L: Umhm. So even after the, the contracts been hammered out, there's still plenty of things that have to be (--)

M: There's, there's things that somehow you know, aren't spelled out.

L: Like what job descriptions, or (--)

M: No, no. Those things are very specific. But I can't think of a thing right at the very second. [Dog howls.] But there were all kinds of little things that would come up that weren't

specifically spelled out in the contract. That you know, you should do it this way. And we'll say no, we think maybe we ought to do it this way.

L: Yeah. [Comment unclear]

M: Come to an agreement on it.

L: Was that your favorite job at Sprague over, over all, or?

M: I didn't negotiate contracts.

L: You didn't do too much of that.

M: No. I would get involved in the union as far as things that were handled by the Industrial Relations Office, hiring, transferring, recalling. They could come in and say you called in Suzy Smith and it should have been Mary Jane. And you know, how come? Well then you'd have to go back. And either yes, you did it correctly, or no, you didn't. Well if you did it incorrectly you had to undo it. That person would have to get layed off and you'd have to do it correctly. So you certainly made a supreme effort not to do that.

L: The lay-offs, let's say, when they had to have them were kind of down to the line, the department would handle them?

M: They were strictly what seniority ordered.

L: Yeah, but they'd get the word from their line supervisor?

M: Yeah, they're the ones that do it. [L: Yeah] We didn't lay-off people.

L: You hired them.

M: We hired them. They layed them off. [Both laugh] And it, you know, they would try very desperately. They would hold on to them sometimes when work was slow and thinking they were going to be getting some orders in, or something right. They really would do everything they could to hold on to them. They didn't arbitrarily trig them in and out.

L: The um, did you have a lot of close friends at work? Did you (--)

M: Oh yeah. A lot. A lot I still keep in touch with. Still bowl on Thursday night and in this what was originally the Sprague Women's Bowling League, but Sprague no longer sponsored it after the strike, but they still, that used to be the Sprague Thursday Night Women's Bowling League. But now it's just Thursday Night Women's Bowling League. But a lot of the people that bowl on it are still Sprague people. It's a good way to keep in touch with people. They're people that I had worked with.

L: Did you do a lot of things together after work you know, other than Sprague related things?

A little social life on your [unclear]?

M: No. Not all that much. All we did for awhile, a group of us had what we called a supper club. And we'd put money away each week and then we'd go out to dinner every once in awhile, and something like that. [L: Yeah] And uh, but I wouldn't say there was an awful lot of it. It was primarily you know, one or two friends that you'd get together. But we did a few things. At one time we had a Bridge Club where we used to meet every once in awhile and play bridge and that sort of thing. Generally speaking most of it was kind of on an individual basis with [L: people you would like to know] (--) Yeah, well you know, with Industrial Relations you got involved a lot in having to go out at night to different functions. And we would have to be the company representative at different type functions that were. And so you got involved in those up here in the north. [L: Umhm] [Unclear] it was part of the job that you had to do.

L: Did you take lunches there? Or did you work through lunch mostly?

M: No. Generally speaking I'd go out at noon just to get out and get a breath of fresh air. [L: Yeah] You know, it just seems better to get fresh air and walk upstream. Sometimes I'd bring a sandwich, sometimes we'd buy a little something on the street, or something. You'd try to get out when the weather was nice. Once in awhile we'd go to the cafeteria. Nice cafeteria there.

L: Is all the same cafeteria for everybody?

M: Well Marshall Street.

L: Marshall Street.

M: Brown Street at one time had a cafeteria and then they discontinued it. Well when it got into the age of putting everything in machines. [L: Yeah] But it uh, it's just that I like the idea as I say, just in getting out and getting a little fresh air and kind of seems to clear your head sometimes.

L: And you had about an hour?

M: Yup. The girls, you know, the girls were out twelve to one. [L: Yeah] So.

L: And you covered the office while they were out, or [M: No. No. No.] no? You were always out twelve to one.

M: Uh, no. If I got held up for awhile, if I went out at quarter after twelve I could come back at quarter after one. And that, nothing said about it. [L: Yeah] And if I didn't go out at all there was nothing said about it either. You know, if you sat there and worked during the noon hour that was all right too.

L: Do you figure you worked on an average forty hour weeks, or?

M: No, you worked more than that ordinarily.

L: You think that's why you ended up promotions over time? It's just (--)

M: Well it generally wasn't just me alone lots of time. It would be group managers staying over and sitting, because it was a nice quiet time to sit and discuss things. And you weren't interrupted by the phone ringing every two seconds, and that sort of thing. So we usually, I, you know, usually wouldn't go home till about six o'clock.

L: Occasionally as I say, it would be later than that. And it all depends on how pressing whatever it was we were working on. Well by this time your children were grown, or (--)

M: Oh yes, yeah.

L: [Rest of comment unclear]

M: My youngest one is now, was just forty-three last week.

L: Wow. So I guess they were able to take care of themselves.

M: Yeah, yeah. They were primarily [unclear].

L: And they all went on to college?

M: Yeah. Well my youngest didn't want to go to college. I was after him. He didn't want to. He went to Pittsfield at that time and took a course in auto body mechanics. And he works in the body shop at Scarponi's. The only one of my children that's around here. My older daughter is in Seattle. My second daughter is currently in White Plains, but she has, she's now a doctor. She's the one that went to Burbank on a Sprague scholarship. She's now a doctor of Nephrologist. And she's just accepted the position at the Mary Emma Jean Bassett Hospital in Cooper's Town, where she's going to be in charge of their kidney dialysis. Well all the rest of it goes to Nephrology. Her daughter is at Williams. Just finished her sophomore year at Williams. Her son, my grandson, my only grandson is graduating from high school, but he spent the last year on an exchange program in Belgium. And he's due back the fifth of June.

L: How about a party.

M: And Amy who is the Williams girl is going to spend next year in Japan. Since she's been at Williams she's been just through all over their Asian Studies Program, and has decided that's what she wants to major in. And got a chance to go to Japan next year through Williams. They have a, I don't know if you're familiar, program where you pay your tuition to Williams, but they make the arrangements and it even includes her air fare. And she has to have her spending money, which I understand will be considerable next year.

L: That's fascinating! She'll send some interesting letters. [Unclear] She'll just go and take her courses in Japanese?

M: Yes, I understand all of her classes are in Jap (--) In fact her Japanese classes this year at Williams have been in Japanese. And for a second year student? I find that amazing that the classes are in Japanese.

L: Did you ever go to college?

M: I went to Portland State Teachers College, quit and got married.

L: Yeah, and never took another course?

M: I've taken some course through Sprague and things like that, but never went on a got a degree. No.

L: You they had an education benefit? Or you had to take them and pay for them.

M: No, Sprague has an educational sponsorship.

L: Was that for all employees?

M: Yeah.

L: Oh, did many people take advantage?

M: Yes. [L: Yeah] That was another thing that (--) That was handled primarily for the Corporate Industrial Relations, but fantastic education sponsorship.

L: At all the state colleges, the local schools?

M: Yeah. Well my favorite story, and I've told it about five hundred times, is about a young man who came here. Worked, back in those days we had cafeteria carts that came to the different departments with coffee and donuts and this sort of thing, his first job was on a cafeteria cart pushing around. And didn't speak english that well, but finally got a job in production. Worked his way up and got in Sprague Educational Sponsorship Program. Sprague sponsored him through a Doctorate. He is still working in North Adams at Sprague. [L: Wow!] And the only we required what they called a completion deposit. He had paid a hundred dollars for his deposit. And that's all he had spent. And when he got his Doctorate I had a check for a hundred dollars and gave it to him. And said, you know, "here's your completion deposit back." He said, "I don't want it." He said, "you take it and give it to somebody." I said, "I can't. You take it and give it to somebody if you want to." [L: Huh] But he [unclear]. Sprague sponsored him all the way through.

L: Wow! And that was full tuition for a passing grade? Wow! This is a first I've heard of that. That is, that's (--)

M: But many, many people got degrees.

L: Yeah. Do you know where that started?

M: It was in effect [unclear] long time. Really, no I'm not exactly sure when this started. No. But it was in effect a long time. And a lot of them got Masters. Not too many got PhD's.

L: Well that's (--)

M: But uh, in fact that's the only one I can say I knew about the PhD. But many got Masters. Many got [unclear].

L: Everybody stayed at Sprague after that?

M: Yup. There was no requirement that you stay beyond you know, the completion of your course or anything. A lot of them did. And Sprague also had a coop program with North Eastern for a long long time. And they hired North Eastern students on that coop program. [L: Umhm. umhm] You know, two people would fill one position. [L: right] And many of those stayed on. A lot of them didn't, but a lot of them did.

L: When was this? How long has North Eastern been doing the coop program?

M: A long time.

L: A long time, so it would have been when Sprague was actively hiring people, instead of (--)

M: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Um, gee. Let's see. I figure, I know early fifties they already had their coop. Now whether they did in the forties or not, whether they started it say, after the world war, or not, I'm not sure. But uh, (--)

L: It's a long time.

M: It's a long time.

L: What was one of the hardest things you ever had to do at Sprague's?

M: Tell somebody they were fired.

L: Was that tough to do?

M: Yeah.

L: Was it just one person, or everybody you ever(--)

M: Oh no. Didn't, didn't do it very often. You know, only maybe two or three, but that is not easy.

L: How far did people have to go to get fired?

M: It's not easy to get fired. Really, it's got to be a gross infringement.

L: Did they have warnings and you had to be written up?

M: Yup. And you know, that I find pretty dramatic. We also had alcoholism counseling program. And uh, and had to on occasion try to talk to some employees that you knew needed to be in the program, and trying to talk them to get into it, which was, was hard to do. You know that was easier in some respect. You knew that was something that should be done, but just how do you approach them, and you know, if I say the wrong thing am I going to make it worse? And you just have to try to get, be able to get through to them and get them. We had a lot of success and we had some failures too, but you know that does happen.

L: Was that program in effect when you started dealing with that, [unclear] about when that started?

M: In 1975 perhaps. [L: Yeah] And we had [unclear] counselor who came in two days a week. He was you know, [unclear] consultant, hired as a consultant.

L: And people could leave their jobs for the time and [M: oh yeah] [few words unclear].

M: We'd set up the meetings and any [few words unclear]. You know, upon his recommendation the insurance would pay. And he was, he is now dead. This is the first man who did it. But I thought he was a wonderful man. And he was a recovered alcoholic himself. And he always, he would say you've got to have been one to treat them.

L: [Unclear]. Um, let's see. [Unclear] You don't really think your job changed much before or after the union? One thing I'll have you do after is draw a little diagram of your jobs and how they branched out and started.

M: Uh, a lot more involvement with the union as far as some problems went, and that sort of thing. You got involved with them a lot more. But I got in a position where I had to be involved with them more too, you know? Publications I didn't have to be involved with them. But uh, as employee relations manager I got involved with them and then [unclear] as employment manager.

L: Now you were editor of the Logue? [L: Yeah] So did anybody above you ever say you know, that you can't run that, or really it was your judgement?

M: No. Primarily judgement. By that time I pretty much knew what could be run and what couldn't be run, or you know, what the policy was. No I never, I usually [comment unclear]. I'd show it to them. But simply to uh, let them see what was in it, that's all. Or occasionally they'd say, you know, we think it would be a good idea if you did this, a story on this, or something like that. So all right we will. [L: Umhm] But they certainly didn't(--) I, I know well enough you couldn't have gone and done something very radical, or anti-company and published it, and have somebody say hooray, but as I say, nobody ever (--)

L: I've only seen a few samples. It seems we had a few from 1938. Everyone had an article about safe driving and the dangers of driving poorly, or driving like a maniac.

M: Yeah, they used to have a lot of features on safety and that sort of thing.

L: Umhm. Did that continue on through when you were (--)

M: No, not that part. Not that.

L: You dropped that part of it. Was there a strong emphasis?

M: Sprague was always very very active in the field of safety. Member of the Western Mass Safety Council and these organization that were promoting manufacturing safety. Very, very active. Very safety conscious. And kept record, very strict records at first on you know, what the, any industrial accidents [unclear]. [L: Umhm] Fortunately over a period in North Adams it was very very little that were serious accidents. And those were all handled, that's all handled through the Industrial Relations Department too. The Medical Department, because [unclear] has been hurt and he has to have hospitalization [unclear] anyway, but the workman's comp and all that was handled in Industrial Relations.

L: Hm. Pretty good. The uh, I don't know, I talked to some people. They had different baths, and bath dips and so on . They, they kept right up with all the safety.

M: Oh yeah, they were very conscious about that. [L: Especially that, yeah] Although like some of them were saying the other day where uh, they used to, the units had to be dipped in a bath type thing. Now a days they're, but it was state of the art then. People were not aware of it. Trichloroethylene, you dipped the units into it to grease them. Um, it was common practice. Nobody wore protective you know, a mask, or anything like that in those days, or hand coverings, or anything else. You know, and it wasn't anywhere nearly as advanced as it is now, or open baths where you dipped this darn stuff. But that's what everybody did. And one problem when PCV's came up, Sprague started making them long before they had to. You know, they just didn't [unclear]. You know, if there's a problem we just [unclear].

L: At that time was this kind of corporate policy still being decided by Robert C. Sprague, or was it just the line of Managers said, we just aren't going to make these things.

M: I don't know exactly where it came from. Mr. Sprague was certainly still there.

L: Yeah. He was very active still.

M: Oh yeah, yeah. He'll be eighty eight years old this year. He's the [rest of sentence unclear]. And his mind is still extremely sharp.

L: So he ran, really did run the company. And he had his managers, but.

M: But he, he knew what was going on.

L: Yeah. Now who did you answer to when you (--)

M: Uh, at the time I was in Corporate it was Bob Sprague, Jr. [L: Yeah] He was Vice-President in Industrial Relations. Then Bob Sprague, Jr. reported to Bill Nolan, William Nolan who was Chief Legal Council for Sprague Electric and one of the original employees of the company. And very affectionately known as Uncle Bill by all the management people. Marvelous, marvelous old gentleman. And then uh, let's see, Local Industrial Relations, when we went, reported to Bob Sprague, Jr. And right after he left reported ultimately to Neil Welch for awhile. And then ultimately to John Sprague at one point in time. It kind of changed, it didn't really change what our things were, but the very top of the command changed over a period of time there.

L: They still kind of stayed the same.

M: Yeah. Fred Thompson was Vice-President of Industrial Relations at one time. Jack Washburn was Vice-President of Industrial Relations for a period of time.

L: Was that kind of a stepping stone on the way to other jobs, or?

M: No. Jack Washburn died when he was Vice-President of Industrial Relations. John [unclear] was another one who was Vice-President of Industrial Relations. He was a great guy. He reported, that was at the days when he reported to Bob Sprague, Jr. John [unclear] did. Uh, but you know, after Bob Sprague, Jr. left it was primarily Neil Welch for most of the time. Although that was a very loose relationship, you know? He never you know, bothered us [unclear].

L: Huh. I suppose he figures you'd been doing everything just fine. [Both speak at the same time-cannot transcribe what each is saying] Why rattle the boat, huh? Gee I've already asked you what was the hardest part of the job, what was, what was the most enjoyable part?

M: A lot of social activities we did. We used to do as I say, the service awards, the bowling banquets. We did a lot of trips and things for employees. We'd take them to a flower show in Boston. Stop at Quincy Market. Stop at the Old Mill at West Minster on the way back. We'd take them on shopping trips. We took them to the Charleston Mill in Newington, New York a couple of times. Uh, took them to the Pheasant Lane Mall in Nashua, New Hampshire. [L: Umhm] Took them too Tall Ships thing in Boston. Went to West Point every year for West Point Game. And you know, a lot of those things like that, but (--)

L: What were the people that would go on these?

M: Well we'd tell them they could go and Sprague always subsidized it to a certain degree. You know they could go for twenty bucks. [door slams] [Comment unclear] Uh, say twenty bucks. That would include their bus ticket, their admission to where so ever and a dinner on the way back. And Sprague would pick up the balance after that. Uh, so that any (--) We've taken as

many as four bus loads at a time. And every bus held forty-seven.

L: It's quite a crowd. Um, could employees suggest trips like that, or [rest of question unclear]?

M: Oh sure, they often did. You get enough of them saying, why don't you get a trip here or there. We had a trip to the Red Socks game a couple of times. Uh, (--)

L: And those were handled through your office?

M: Yeah.

L: How do you arrange a hundred and sixty tickets for a ball game!

M: The bus company got them for us. [L: Oh!] Charter the bus and tell him to get the tickets for us. [L: laughs] And they did. Apparently they um, do tours like that. We always used you know, Englishers. We always had good luck with them. And uh, they've gotten, when there were tickets that had to be gotten, they've got them for us. They've gotten tickets for the flower show, the ball games, and West Point. I think, no we had our own tickets for West Point. [Comment unclear]

L: Could you tell me a little bit about how you felt about the seventy strike?

M: You mean how I felt about [L: yeah, personally] was it a just thing, or an unjust thing. I thought it was a very foolish thing. I felt people weren't really thinking of what they were doing. And I, as I say, I think that the office union pretty much forced the production union out. And I think if they hadn't by whatsoever means gone on strike that it gives it a fairly good chance it might never had happened. And I think it was devastating as far as, they say you know, we only called back about a third of the people.

L: If they hadn't had the strike do you think more people would have remained employed?

M: Oh sure. [Cannot hear comment] You know, it was a pretty hard blow to get over. And they did come back. They came back you know, really quite well. But (--)

end of tape